

Gender Roles in Marriage

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Gender roles in marriage represent a kind of social roles, a variety of behavioral norms for men and women. Their diverse character in different cultures and epochs proves the hypothesis that such roles are shaped by these factors. Various countries and communities have their own distinct vision of the functions and responsibilities of each marriage partner. There is no unified gender role like a man or a woman – they are husbands and wives or fathers and mothers.

In spite of the changes in the American society, traditional roles still prevail, and a man is still considered to be the breadwinner of the family, even though both a husband and a wife are usually employed and earn money together, and despite the fact that contemporary women sometimes earn more than their husbands. Moreover, the majority of American people believe that household chores should be shared between marriage partners, however, most men expect their wives to cook and clean the house (Atkinson, 1987, p.6).

Traditional Gender Roles

Traditional gender roles in marriage imply patterns of marital relationships in which a man is considered to be the head of the family and the breadwinner who feeds his wife and children, while a woman is responsible for child care, purchasing and cooking food, as well as running the household and family budget. Thus, until the past several years traditional gender roles have remained predominant and generally accepted as the norm in the society. The main drawback of this system is inability of women to develop their potential and discover their

unique talents unrelated to family issues (Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega, and Weitz, 2007, p.145). It also resulted in gender discrimination when applying for a job or to educational institutions.

Nowadays, gender roles in marriage are changing gradually day by day. Women gain more significance on the job market, and become valued and respected employees receiving equal compensation with men, equal opportunities for self-development and growth. In our modern society financial independence of women is no longer surprising. Moreover, now females not only work in every area of business, but also are getting promoted to top-level positions. Undoubtedly, it has contributed greatly to the overall progress of society. In addition, industrial revolution in USA and Europe has influenced gender roles, giving women numerous and equal opportunities (Atkinson, 1987, p.35).

Marriage Types

According to Coltrane (1997), three major family categories can be distinguished: breadwinner, egalitarian, and middle type. Breadwinner is considered to be a traditional gender role in marriage (p. 78). This marriage type represents a household where a man works to sustain his family, and his wife stays at home fulfilling her responsibilities as a housewife. In this case the wife's role is more submissive, while the role of the husband is competitive and aggressive. During the first half of the twentieth century the breadwinner type of marriage was the most common in the United States. In this kind of family, when mother is the primary homemaker and caregiver, the influence of the parents on their children's attitude towards marriage is very strong. Their children are most likely to create a traditional kind of family when they grow up.

Egalitarian type is a kind of marriage where husband and wife are both employed and earn money for the family. They share household responsibilities and equally take part in child care. This type of family is more liberal and can be described as an equal partnership between two individuals who share their earnings, housework, and time spent with children.

However, it becomes more difficult for a couple to pay equal attention to each job, especially after the birth of their first child. As soon as it occurs, very often couples fall into traditional marriage roles without even noticing it. In this case the wife becomes responsible for the domestic sphere, receiving little help from her husband. According to sociologists, many young married people find themselves in pseudo egalitarian marriage. The problem lies in cultural norms that have been embedded in our minds, and it is not easy to suddenly evolve and become more egalitarian. In the past twenty years egalitarian type of marriage has become more popular in the United States (Atkinson, 1987, p.40). Women became more financially independent and competitive, while men started to spend more time on housework and their children.

The middle type of marriage is a combination of both, the breadwinner and the egalitarian types. In this kind of marriage wife works less than her husband, therefore having more time to run the house and look after the children.

Man's Role in Marriage and Family

The traditional understanding of a man's role in marriage regards husband as a sole breadwinner. However, as compared to 1950s, in the U.S., when this role was dominant in America, nowadays families where husband is the only earner, represent less than 10 percent of

the population (Atkinson, 1987, p.42). In spite of this fact, man's role in the family has not significantly changed since that time, because in reality women are still responsible for the house and children, and are engaged in the household chores much more than men.

Nonetheless, according to Coltrane, social changes have had great impact on people's perception of marriage and have changed their preferences to more egalitarian family relationships since 1960s (p. 154). On the one hand, this kind of change shows that society realized the importance of equal opportunities and respect for women as capable employees. But on the other hand, it has doubled the amount of work such women have to deal with. Now, apart from everyday business responsibilities, they have to come home, feed their family, clean the house and do shopping.

Woman's Career and Marriage Structure

"To build or not to build a career?" – is a one of the challenges of contemporary women, who no longer want to be seen as housewives incapable of earning money and being successful in business. The answer to this question and the decision made by a woman to pursue her career has a great impact on her role in marriage or her decision to marry (Brinkerhoff et al., 2007, p. 189). Ultimately, this decision influences and alters the social norms and cultural values of any country.

It is a very heated debate whether or not a woman has a right to choose career over family. Some people believe that a woman is predetermined to be a mother, and that career plans pull her away from her natural role. In our society many women are too busy and spend many years achieving their professional goals, missing the time to enter into long-term relationships,

get married and bring up healthy children, thus losing a chance to play their role as primary caretakers (Charlie, 2010).

Consequently, unlike men, women experience a conflict of two desires – to have a good family and to be successful. Unfortunately, the majority of them do not believe that it is possible to have both: a family with children and a good career at the same time. Those who get salary increase and promotions, statistically have fewer children than those women who earn less money, even though they can afford nannies and everything else needed to raise their children (Charlie, 2010). This kind of women are used to their tight schedule too much and are afraid to go out of sight for a few months to give birth to a child, or are not sure they will be able to give enough time and attention to their kid.

As we can see, during the recent years women have received equal opportunities with men at the workplace. However, at home they are still not regarded as equals due to the fact that traditional understanding of marriage is deeply rooted in the minds of men, who prefer their wives to do the housework, and provide them with all the necessary things, while they earn money and feed their families.

Conclusion

Gender roles, marriage styles, and family values are chosen by people based on their family background, education, or religion. Usually, religious people tend to get married earlier and create traditional family types. Middle marriage type is a preference for families where both partners are employed, however if they decide to have a child, a woman temporarily stays at

home and takes responsibility as a care giver. Egalitarian marriage is most commonly preferred by less religious people, who are self-sufficient and well-educated (Coltrane, 1997, p.203).

Recent changes of gender roles in marriage help people establish equality and realize their potential. In addition, economic instability can no longer utterly ruin family budget since women are not only permitted to work, but also have various opportunities to become valued, respected, and highly compensated employees (Charlie, 2010). Moreover, all the information women receive during the working day can help them educate and raise children more effectively.

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